

NCA 150 Dartmoor

Overview

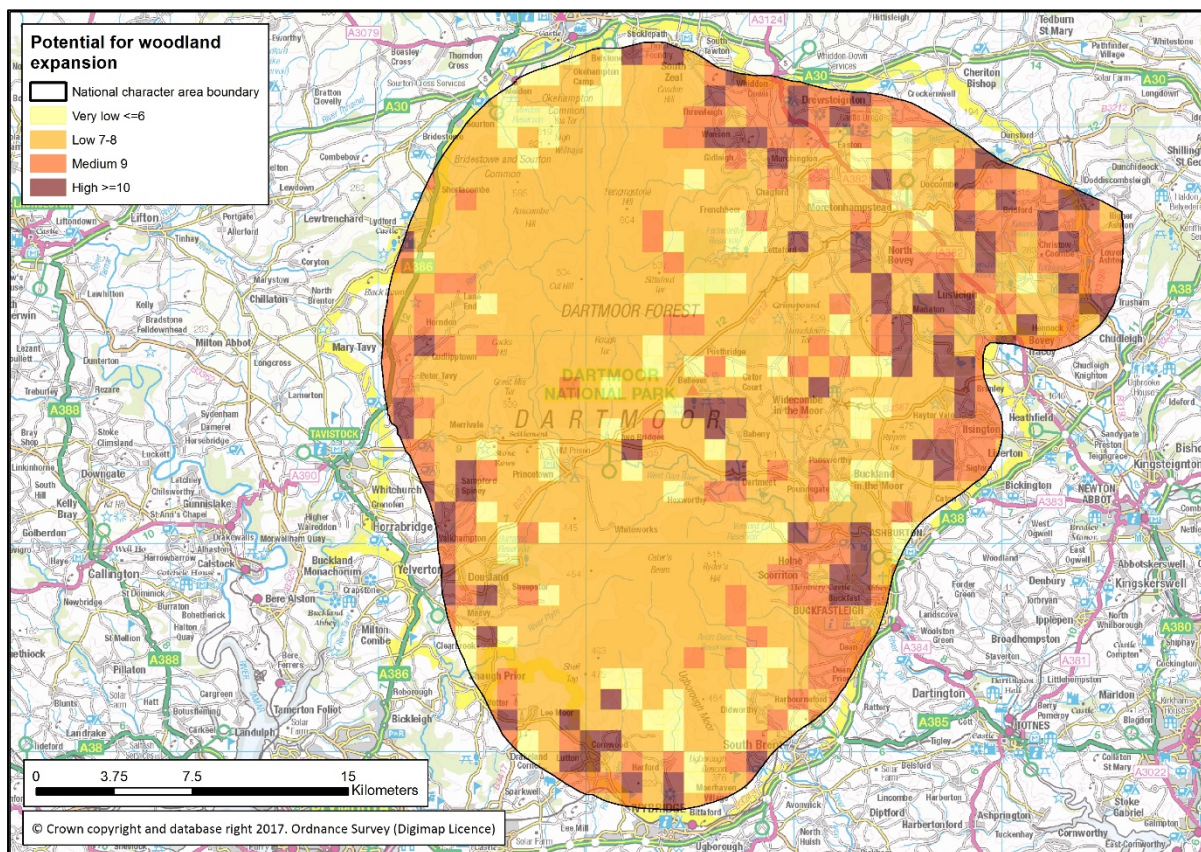
The Dartmoor NCA is an area of high, open moorland with an enclosed pastoral and woodland fringe, which is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. It is characterised by the underlying granite, which outcrops as rocky tors. The moorland is cut by numerous, fast-flowing rivers which have cut deeply-incised valleys. Almost the whole of the area is within the Dartmoor National Park, and it has a remote and sparsely settled landscape character. Land cover is dominated by thick deposits of peat and large expanses of upland heathland and grass moorland, grazed by sheep, cattle and Dartmoor ponies. The surrounding land, particularly in the valleys, is an enclosed part of the upland farming system, used for overwintering, hay and feed crops. The enclosed land is characterised by small, irregular fields bounded by drystone walls, hedgebanks and hedgerows, though there are some areas of later, Parliamentary-era enclosures on higher ground. There are also significant areas of ancient, relict field systems on the moorlands. The settlement pattern is highly dispersed, comprising mostly hamlets and farmsteads in the valleys and fringes of the moor. Villages, found on the periphery of the moorland, tend to be small and compact, whilst the main urban settlements such as Okehampton, are located just outside the NCA's boundaries. Roads are few and local in character, and are mainly located along the valleys and around the edges of the moor. The main route that crosses the moor is the B3212, which is a popular tourist route. The NCA is relatively well-wooded, given the upland moorland character of much of the area. It has a total coverage of 12%, of which over a quarter is ancient woodland. Woodland is concentrated in the steep valleys on the fringes of the moor, although there are two significant areas of ancient oak woodland on the moor itself.

The Historic Environment Character

Although the moors now have an appearance of being unsettled, Dartmoor has an extremely rich record of visible archaeological remains, dating from the Bronze Age onwards. Prehistoric monuments include stone circles and stone rows, field systems, settlements, barrows and cairns. In the medieval period, there was a pattern of upland grazing, with an associated infrastructure of droveways linking the settlements to the moorlands. Settlement expanded onto the moors, though contracted again from the 14th century. Settlement shrinkage and desertion has left an exceptional legacy of archaeological remains, both the settlements themselves and of their associated field systems, including ridge and furrow and lynchets. Deserted settlements include those at Hound Tor and Hutholes. From the 15th century, the farming economy was primarily pastoral, but includes some mixed farming and cider production. The area has a high survival of farmhouses dating to the 17th century or earlier. In addition to agriculture, the area was exploited for granite as a building stone, and minerals such as tin and copper, and farmers often had by-employment in the extractive industries. There has been military use of the moor from the early 19th century, and Dartmoor Prison was constructed by and for Napoleonic prisoners of war. Large parts of the moor are still used as a military range. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, reservoirs and dams were constructed on Dartmoor to supply water to the surrounding towns.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, generally scattered across the area, though mainly around areas that are already wooded. Opportunities to plant new woodland could, therefore, support those areas highlighted in the NCA profile, such as managing and extending the internationally important western oak woodlands on steep valley sides and in coastal combs. New planting could also reinforce the traditional pattern of hedgerows and hedgebanks, whilst still retaining the ancient field patterns. It is important, when designing new woodland within the NCA, to retain the sense of openness across much of the area.



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